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by Dr Manzoor Ahmed

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NEWS BRIEFS

Gano Forum rally today

By Staff Correspondent
Gano Forum will hold a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the city today at 4 pm, says a news release. Party chief Dr Kamal Hossain and other central leaders will address the rally. The rally will be followed by a procession.

Shahjahan Siraj joins BNP today

Shahjahan Siraj MP, along with his followers, will join the BNP today. Siraj told BSS last night that the joining ceremony would be held at 4 pm at the Prime Minister's Hare Road office.

Christmas Day fire kills 2

MUNICH (Germany). Dec 25: A father and his five-year-old son died when their house caught fire early on Christmas Day, police said. The man's three other children escaped by jumping from a window. The 38-year-old man and a neighbour caught the children as they jumped. The father then went back into the house to rescue the fourth child, but both died in the blaze, police said. The cause of the fire in the Bavarian village of Reichenhofen was not immediately known, police said. reports AP.

Last-minute parleys to end impasse

By Asiuzaaman
undisclosed venue, informed sources said.

"But the outcome of the day-long parleys could not be known because the leaders were not available till 1:15 am last night.

A family member of Salam Talukder told The Daily Star that he returned home around 11:30 pm but left again around midnight after receiving a phone call.

A man who received the phone at Jamal's residence around 1:00 am said: "he is now at the Prime Minister's residence."

He confirmed Jamal's day-long programmes and said "Something is expected to be worked out." He could not elaborate.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad and Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim were not at home till late last night. Their family members could not confirm their whereabouts.

Meanwhile, some sources said that a number of Western diplomats showed their interest to help resolve the political crisis.

US Ambassador David N Merrill called on Begum Zia on Saturday at her Tejgaon office.

Details of the meeting were not available but a PM Office source said the US ambassador expressed thanks for Bangladesh's active participation in the UN mission in Bosnia.

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Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina vacated her Minto Road residence yesterday.

— Star photo

Hasina vacates her official residence

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday quit her official residence, three days before the opposition members' planned resignation from the Jatiya Sangsad on December 28.

"There is no justification of staying in a government house since we're resigning," she told newsmen at 29 Minto Road just before she left the house in the evening.

The Awami League chief will now stay at the Dhanmondi residence of her scientist-husband Dr Wazed Ali Miah at Road no 5.

"I'm not fighting for myself. I'm fighting for people's voting right," Hasina said before her departure around 8:15 pm.

Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif accompanied the Leader of the Opposition to her new residence.

Before leaving the official residence, she asked her staff to deposit all government materials properly.

A three-member delegation of the Biswa Ijtema was the

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Over 1000 Chechens killed : Moscow

Grozny now a ghost town

GROZNY, Dec 25: After nearly a week of intense bombing, the capital of Chechnya is becoming a ghost town. Grozny was eerily calm today, and the remaining residents searched for food and shelter amid the ruins, reports AP.

Heavy fighting was reported in villages outside the besieged city, but the vastly outnumbered Chechens showed no sign of meeting the Russian demand to capitulate. Russian jets returned late in the day and bombed Grozny.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, senior members of the Russian government met ahead of a key session of President Boris Yeltsin's Security Council that is scheduled for Monday.

The Kremlin has vowed to continue the military action

A sister, claiming to have lent money to her brother, turned up at his Dhanmondi residence, along with some armed youths, yesterday and fired shots injuring one Rintu Mahmud, police sources said.

Mahmud, who received serious bullet injuries in his chest, was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The enraged sister, Nasim Banu, after being arrested by Dhankandi police, alleged she had lent five lakh taka to her brother Waker Hossain, a few months ago, but now he was refusing to repay the money.

According to witnesses, Banu, along with four young men, came to Hossain's house at West Dhanmondi and started shouting for repayment.

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Christmas celebrated

By Staff Correspondent

The Christian community of the country, as elsewhere in the world, yesterday celebrated Christmas — their greatest religious festival, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ.

The festival began at different churches across the country with the ringing of bell midnight Saturday. The community members decorated and illuminated their houses on the occasion.

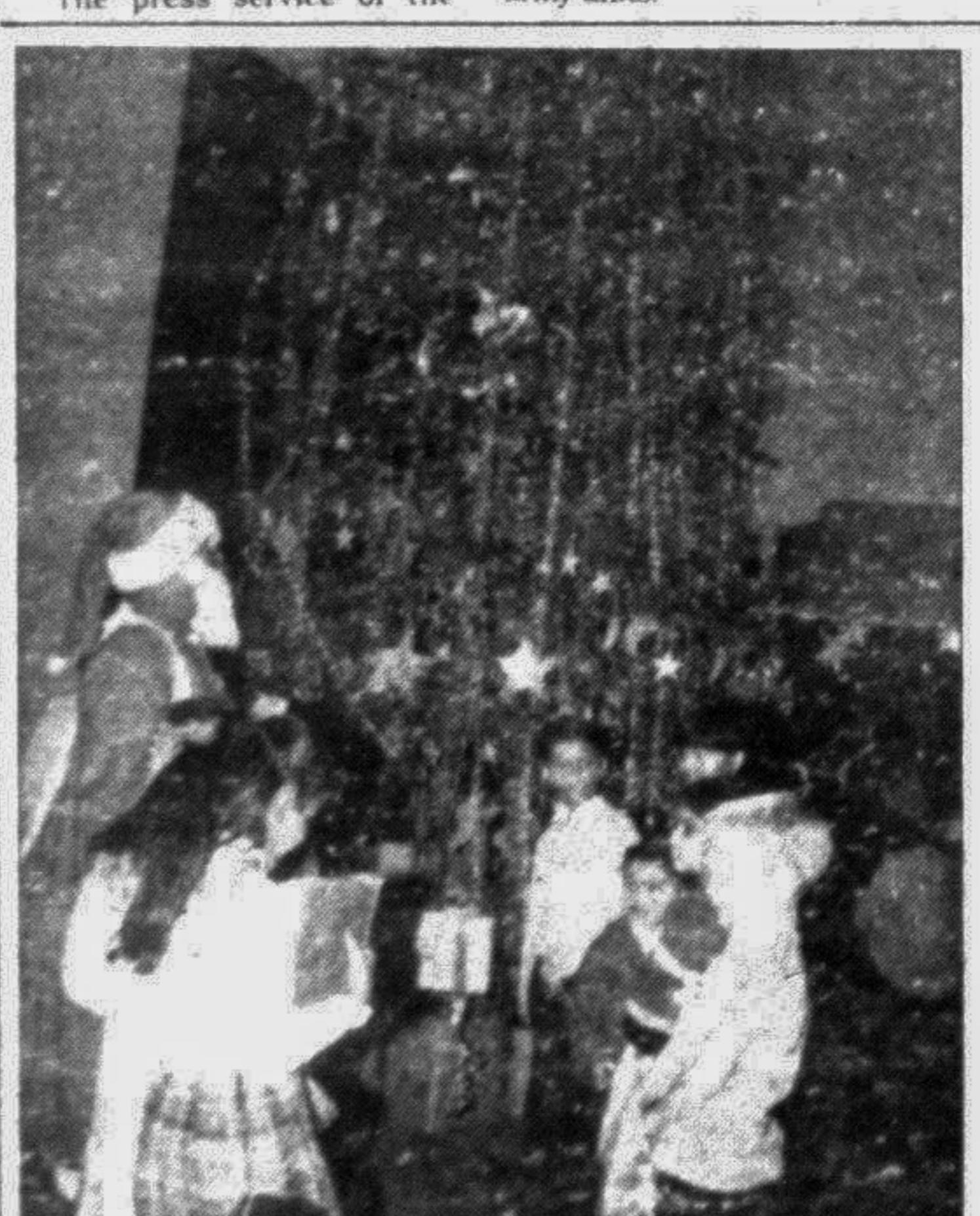
In the capital, the holy masses were held at different churches including the St. Mary's cathedral at Kakrul, Holy Rosary Church at Tejgaon, Holy Cross Church at Laxmibazar, National Seminary at Banani, St. Christian's Church at Asad Gate and Kafrel Catholic Church.

The day was a public holiday.

The members of the community decorated their homes with Christmas trees and cut the Christmas cakes amid carol singing.

The Christian devotees — male, female and children — were seen parading the streets.

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A group of children meet Santa Claus at a Christmas Day celebration in a city hotel yesterday.

ALGIERS, Dec 25 : Algeria rejected today a demand by Islamic fundamentalist hijackers of a French airliner to be allowed to take off from Algiers Airport, and France said it had offered to send crack troops to help end the hostage drama.

Terrified passengers spent Christmas Day under the guns of Muslim militants, who killed two hostages and demanded to be flown out of Algiers.

Three more hostages were released today amid tense negotiations by radio between authorities in the control tower and the group of five gunmen speaking from the cockpit of the Air France plane at Algiers' airport.

That raised the total number freed to at least 60 since the jetliner with 227 passengers and 12 crew members was commanded shortly before takeoff Saturday, officials said. Air France earlier put the number of passengers at 271.

One former hostage de-

Publication

of text books delayed

By Staff Correspondent

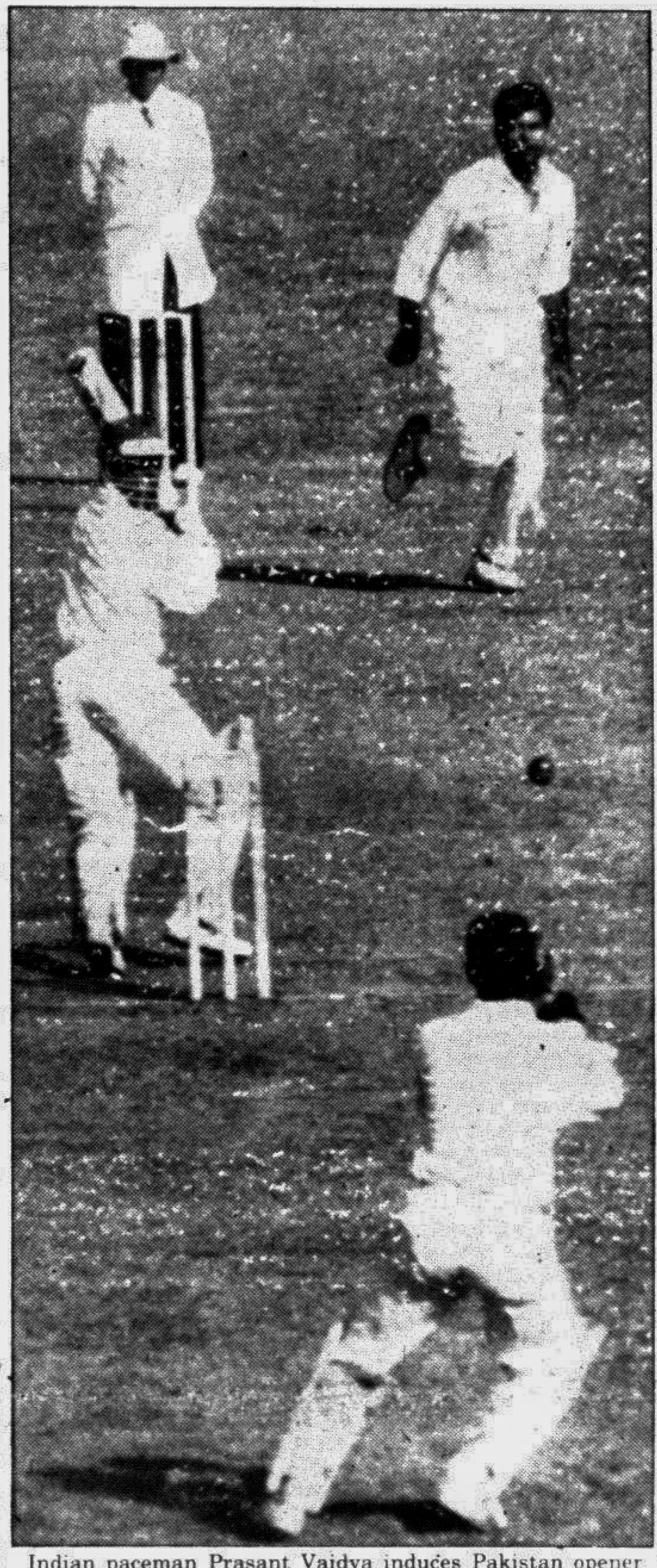
With only six days left for the 1995 academic session in the country's high schools to begin, the printing of text books for the students is still to be completed.

In previous years, the text books were printed within December, sources concerned said.

Due to shortfall in newsprint production at the Khulna Newsprint Mills (KNM) this year, the enlisted publishers of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has not yet received adequate supply of papers for printing the books.

Sources in NCTB hinted that completion of the publication of text books might take another two months. The publishers, during their meetings with NCTB Chairman Md Khurshed Alam twice recently, requested him to take up the matter with

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Indian paceman Prasant Vaidya induces Pakistan opener Sajid Ali into an away-from-the-body swish and wicketkeeper Vijay Yadav is perfectly poised to pay the batsman for his prodigality. (Detailed story on Page 10).

— Star photo by A K M Mohsin

Seismic survey for oil from Jan 4 likely

By Sharier Khan

Cairn Plc of Scotland and Holland Sea Search of the Netherlands are likely to begin seismic survey in the Bay of Bengal for exploration of oil and gas on January 4.

The two companies have engaged two other foreign firms to carry out preliminary survey in the shore areas and the Bay near the Cox's Bazar-Sandwip region, identified as Block 16. Petrobangla sources said.

Racial Survey, one of the two firms, has already established survey reference points on the shore.

Bigcon, the other contractor, has begun scouting the Bay with a local tug boat.

A specially equipped survey vessel — the Rosseal — will ar-

rive shortly to carry out the survey for 25 to 30 days, depending on the weather in the Bay, the sources said.

It will cost US dollars 30,000 daily to hire the Rosseal. Any delay in clearing the arrival of the vessel by the authorities would cause losses to both the foreign companies and the government, they added.

The vessel will explore some 1500 km of the Bay and also provide training to Petrobangla experts.

After completing the seismic survey by February, Cairn Plc and Sea Search will prepare for the drilling of hydrocarbon reserves which is likely to begin by November or December.

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Fenchuganj power plant begins trial operation

FENCHUGANJ (Sylhet), Dec 25: Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman formally inaugurated trial production of the 90 megawatt combined cycle power plant here Saturday, reports UNB.

The power plant, comprising two 30 MW gas turbine units and one 30 MW steam turbine unit, has been built at a cost of Tk 404 crore with Japanese assistance.

Scheduled to be completed by November, 1995, the plant went into trial production 10 months ahead of schedule.

When completed, the power plant would not only augment power supply in the national grid but would also stabilise the distribution position in this part of the country.

Syria-Israel peace talks end without result

DAMASCUS, Dec 25: Syrian Israeli peace talks in Washington have ended without result, the official Syrian news agency Sana said today, reports Reuters.

Sana said Israel had made "impossible demands" during the talks which opened at the US State Department on Thursday.

Meetings for the exchange of views between the Syrian and Israeli sides ended in Washington without reaching any specific results, Sana said. It said US Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross was expected to follow up the discussions with the Syrian and Israeli ambassadors after the Christmas and new year holidays.

Sana said the chief of staff of the Syrian armed forces Major General Hikmat Shihabi and Syria's ambassador to Washington, Walid al-Moualem, took part in the talks with their Israeli opposite numbers.

Zail Singh dead

CHANDIGARH, Dec 25: Zail Singh, the first Indian president from the minority Sikh community and the head of state during a Sikh separatist insurrection, died Sunday nearly a month after he was injured in a road accident. He was 78, reports AP.

Singh, who was president from 1982 to 1987, suffered complications after incurring multiple fractures when his car hit a truck on Nov 29. Doctors said he had breathing problems, kidney failure and had to have a pacemaker implanted to regulate his heartbeat. The exact cause of death was not anounced.

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Interview of BNP nomination seekers Dec 29

Persons who have submitted their applications seeking BNP's nomination for the by elections to Bakerganj-6, Brahmanbaria-6, Sherpur-3 and Natore-3 constituencies have been requested to remain present for interview at the central office of the party (28/1, Nayapaltan, Dhaka) on December 29 at 8 pm, reports BSS.

A press release of the BNP said last night that the presidents and general secretaries of the respective districts have also been requested to remain present on time.

1.2 billion Muslims in the world

JEDDAH, Dec 25: The number of Muslims has risen to 1.2 billion to make up 23.2 per cent of the world's population, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said today.

The organisation, based in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Port of Jeddah, said in a report that Muslim minorities living outside the territories of its own 52 members amounted to 386 million people.